

**Amendment to the Claims**

1. (Currently amended) An article joining control method for joining articles conveyed and stored in a plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths for storing therein a plurality of articles, from said plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths to a main conveyance path conveying articles, in which when a spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is detected between articles or between groups of articles being conveyed on the main conveyance path, the stored articles corresponding to the length of the spacing are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance paths to the main conveyance path, characterized in that:

when it is confirmed that articles are stored at a position in close proximity to a junction with the main conveyance path and a time-up period lapses, each auxiliary conveyance path reserves a detected spacing in the main conveyance path, subsequently when this reserved spacing approaches the junction, the articles corresponding to the spacing in size are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance path for joining to the spacing, and when the articles have been cut out, carrying and storing articles into and in the auxiliary conveyance path is stopped for a given time; and

when it is impossible to cut out all the articles stored in this auxiliary conveyance path to the reserved spacing, another spacing is reserved in the main conveyance path for cutting out of the articles remaining in this auxiliary path, with priority over other auxiliary paths.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Original) An article joining control method as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that:

the spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is a spacing equal to a spacing preset between the groups of articles in a before-and-behind relation plus a minimum length of the stored article.